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Gambling In Ignorance With Lives Yet Unborn

The problems which confront mankind in nuclear testing and nuclear war are moral and political, not scientific. There is no way to avoid these moral and political responsibilities by referring the problems to the scientists, as if we could thus get a mechanical and exact reply. The report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation contains no surprises. It finds that nuclear testing "involves new and largely unknown hazards to present and future populations" and that cessation of testing would benefit human health. The decision as to whether this risk is justifiable remains a political decision "outside the scope" (as the majority conclusions say) of the committee's authority.

To understand this report and its inconclusive character, one must see it in the perspective of what science does not know. Three statements may be made with certainty in this whole field, but all three are negative. The first is that in the half century or so with which man has become familiar with radiation, first through the discovery of the X-ray and more recently with nuclear fission and fusion, he has constantly underestimated its dangers. "By 1922," as this report says, "about 100 radiologists had died from its effects." Since 1928 there has been an International Commission on Radiological Protection which fixes safe standards of maximum permissible exposure for persons working with radioactive materials. It is striking that in the past generation the supposedly safe standards have been steadily reduced from 2500 units ("rems") a year to 5 units. The more we learn the greater the danger seems to be. Year by year the "safety" level has been lowered.

The Data Is Triply Inadequate

The second statement which can be made with certainty in this field is that the basis of our estimates as to danger are inadequate. They are inadequate in three ways. They are inadequate statistically; the number of cases studied is far too small, the samplings too spotty, to enable us to draw conclusions from them which can reliably be applied to the whole world population. The scientific data is also inadequate in that so much of it deals not with humans but with other forms of life, some as different from us as unicellular animals. Even in the case of experiments on so closely related a mammal as the mouse, "man and mouse are sufficiently different," as this UN report warns, to make conclusions drawn from mice "particularly uncertain" when applied to man.

The data available on radiation danger is inadequate in another respect. What we need to learn is the danger to man from low levels of radiation over extended periods of time—his 30 years of reproductive capacity in order to assess the genetic dangers, his 70 year life span to determine the so-

matic danger from cancers and other possible radiation-induced disorders. But most of our knowledge is based on experiments with high levels of radiation, large doses applied to other species of life in the laboratory or to men through accidents. "At present," as the UN Committee points out, "opinions as to the possible effects of low radiation levels must be based only on extrapolations from experience with high doses and dose rates." Yet—as the report recognizes—inferences drawn from experience with short high doses may prove a poor guide to experience with prolonged low doses. Man, the report warns, "may prove to be unusually vulnerable to . . . continuous exposure at low levels, on account of his known sensitivity to radiation, his long life, and the long interval between conception and the end of the period of reproduction." These uncertainties emphasize the responsibilities of our generation. We are gambling with the lives of the unborn.

Fall-Out Not At All Uniform

There is a third statement which can now be made with certainty in this field. Fallout from weapons testing is so non-uniform in its distribution as to make nonsense of estimates as to danger based on so-called world-wide averages—as in the UN report itself. Though the report is stuffily academic and points none of this up, a careful and studious reading of the full text and the annexes will show how completely our Atomic Energy Commission spokesmen like Dr. W. F. Libby misled us in talking as if fallout were uniform. If fallout were uniform, then the danger would be uniformly distributed around the earth and averages would be meaningful and trustworthy. But if fallout is not uniform, then the averages (like the average of your income and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s) are meaningless. Whole States, countries or regions may have an incidence of fallout so far above the world-wide average as to be dangerous. Nowhere is this report so disappointing as in its failure to discuss this problem of world-wide averages, and the related problems of what levels of radiation can be considered safe when applied to the world's population rather than merely to persons working with radioactivity. (The report limits its discussion of this last question to a cryptic footnote in small type on page 42).

So-called "local" fallout may affect areas "several thousand kilometres from the test-sites," and in these areas shorter-lived isotopes like radioactive iodine (which affects the thyroid) may be dangerous. Tropospheric fallout (in the lower atmosphere) affects the northern latitudes more than the southern. But it is in dealing with the stratosphere, where long-lived radioactive poisons like strontium 90 and caesium

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137 are stored, that one finds the greatest uncertainties and non-uniformities. "The world-wide fall-out rate and deposits of Sr90," says Annex D (p. 100), "is uneven and there are variations with latitude which show maxima is the region between 30 degrees and 50 degrees North and South, with a minimum near equator. . . . The computation of a world-wide average of fallout rate and deposit is rendered difficult by the existence of large areas not covered by surveys. It is clear, however, that the southern hemisphere has accumulated deposits that are lower than the average, while areas in the northern hemisphere (Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States)* have deposits of about three times the world average."

Non-Uniform in Time As Well As Space

Added to the non-uniformity of distribution in space there seems also to be a non-uniformity in time. The forecasts on probable fall-out levels is based on a computation which assumes that about 12 percent of the radioactive poison in the stratosphere comes down each year. But the scientific annex on "environmental contamination" (a euphemism adopted to avoid the term nuclear fallout) warns at page 110 that "the concept of a constant fractional removal per year of the stratospheric content is inconsistent with meteorological principle. However, nothing better can be offered at present." On top of this, the elaborate equations utilized to forecast future fallout are hamstrung because data on "the injection rate of Sr90 into the stratosphere" by bomb testing were "not available to the Committee." This means—though the scientists were too discreet to say it plainly—that the three testing powers did not make available data on how much they have tested in megatonnage. (Only debris from megaton explosions reaches the stratosphere). On top of this it must be kept in mind that the mechanisms for estimating the content of the stratospheric reservoir and our information on "the chain of events that occur between injection of the radioactive material and its appearance as fallout on the ground" are only adequate enough for short-term estimates of danger and these as the report admits (p. 13) are "insufficient for the evaluation of biological hazards from stratospheric fall-out."

Rice-Eaters and Milk-Drinkers

The averages and the forecasts are equally shaky, but the actual observations do represent firm data and here the non-uniformities are striking. Countries deriving most of their dietary calcium from rice (like Japan) seem to get about five times as much strontium 90 in their diet as countries which derive most of their calcium from milk (like the U. S.). Diet, soil, weather all create variations. There seem to be variations so wide within countries as to make national averages as deceptive as world-wide averages. Thus a chart on page 106 showing average concentrations of strontium 90 in milk in selected areas shows 22 strontium units for the last half of 1957 in Mandan, North Dakota (we hear unofficially that it has more recently gone up to 35 units) as compared with 3.9 in Perry, N. Y., and 5 units in New York City. National averages, like world-wide, may seem to be

* Parenthesis in original.

well below a level of safety but whole states may nevertheless have fall-out so high as to be in the danger zone. The National Committee for A Sane Nuclear Policy has justifiably criticized the UN report for paying so little attention to such local phenomena. The National Committee cited "the March rains in Berkeley, California, in which radioactivity rose as high as 208 times that set for 'safe' drinking and situations in which radioactivity rose to 1,000 or 2,000 times the standard for vegetables grown in fall-out areas in California." Public attention needs to be focussed on the disarming fallacies and fallacious reassurance in the use of averages.

Each Year the Poison Rises

It is also important to focus attention on the fact that all the figures show a steady rise in the accumulation of radioactive poisons, in the soil, in milk, and in human bone. The data in the UN report are already a year old, and it is to be hoped that the new session of the General Assembly will extend the life of the Committee so that this data can be kept up to date.

There is much for the UN Committee to do. It should urge the establishment of an international study bureau to encourage and finance investigation into the many unanswered genetic, biological, radiological, physical, and meteorological questions on which the report touches. It should do a separate report on the whole problem of averages to lay the basis for establishing safe standards of exposure for world-wide populations to all radiation, from all sources. And we think Dr. Ralph Lapp made a most fruitful suggestion when he said "the real problem remains untouched—the problem of local fall-out following nuclear war. I believe the important task awaiting the UN Committee today is a prospectus of the biological consequences of nuclear war." Perhaps India or Japan in the General Assembly will initiate action or widen the tasks of the UN Committee for this purpose.

An Extraordinary Unanimity

Realistically considered, the UN Committee has performed its task with extraordinary unanimity. In a sharply divided world, it managed to achieve unanimity on all but one paragraph, that dealing with the cessation of tests. Even here the differences between the rejected Soviet and Indian resolutions and the text as adopted by the majority were chiefly in emphasis. While the text proposed by the U. S. S. R. (with Czech and Egyptian support) said "there should be an immediate cessation of test explosions of nuclear weapons" and the Indian substitute (which France, Japan and the U. S. supported) ended by calling "nuclear tests" at present the "main source" of the radioactive danger, the majority did suggest "the cessation of contamination of the environment by explosions of nuclear weapons" would "act to the benefit of human health." What registers on the mind of mankind is that all the experts from both sides and the neutral countries agree that testing is dangerous to mankind, including many generations yet to be born. This can be one more powerful instrument toward an agreement to end testing forever if only enough Americans are stirred to act. For it is here in Washington that the decision will be made and that the opposition is entrenched.

Fullbright Asks How Long We Can Go On Ignoring 600 Million Chinese

We present here the key portions of the speech made in the Senate August 6 by Fulbright of Arkansas, No. 2 man on the Democratic side of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the sharpest Senate criticism yet of Administration foreign policy in the current crisis, and the first open challenge in a long time to the non-recognition of Communist China.—IFS.

"The truth is, Mr. President, that our foreign policy is inadequate, outmoded and misdirected. . . . An aphorism I heard the other day has some pertinence in this connection. A man may fail many times, this saying goes, but he is not really a failure until he starts blaming others. I suggest this is true of nations, too, Mr. President, and it is painfully descriptive of the U. S. Government at this point in history. Everything that goes wrong is laid at the door of Communism. I suggest that some of the blame belongs closer to home. . . .

"We can denounce the Soviet Union for seeking a foothold in the Middle East, or we can examine our own failure to develop policies which win the acceptance of the peoples of that region. We can decry the Soviet Union's great influence in China, or we can look to ourselves for cutting off all our contacts with the Chinese people by emulating the habits of the ostrich. . . . We can berate the Soviet Union for posing before the world as the defender of the ordinary man's interest in peace, or we can look to ourselves for our failure to give intelligent leadership to mankind's hope for peace.

Forgetting Our Own Past

"A principal factor involved in this process is that in the fear of the devilry of Communism, we have cast ourselves indiscriminately in the role of the defender of the status quo. . . . Here we are a Nation that for decades prided itself on its revolutionary tradition, on its willingness to experiment. . . . But today this dynamic Nation is shrinking in the eyes of the world from the spectre of revolution . . . an obstacle to change at the very time when the world is in a ferment of cataclysmic change.

"I do not ascribe this particular weakness to the present administration. I suspect that the roots of this fearful clinging to the status quo go back at least to the collapse of Nationalist China. There is a popular concept in this country, Mr. President, that the chief trouble with our policies with respect to China was that we failed to give sufficient military and other aid in sufficient time; in effect, that we did not become sufficiently involved with the Nationalist government to sustain it. I am afraid that the opposite may be the case, that in order to maintain the status quo in China we gave too much and became too deeply involved with a

The Real Red Menace

"The Soviet Union has indeed been our greatest menace—not so much because of what it has done but because of the excuses it has provided us for our own failures. I am told that even now leaders of the administration go to bed with tracts from the Marxist litany in order to better understand their adversaries. Now, Mr. President, I am not averse to these studious pursuits. I suggest, however, that they ought not to be followed to the point of obsession. They ought not to be used, like a hot pad, as a comforting device to provide surcease from the more chilly business of examining our policies with a view to removing the weaknesses and inadequacies which the Communists are only too happy to exploit."

—Fulbright (D. Ark.), U. S. Senate, Aug. 6.

government which had failed to meet the demands of its people for change. . . .

"Look through the sorry record of the past ten years. What does it show? It shows aid extended indiscriminately to governments which serve the needs of their peoples and alike to those which do not. It shows aid eagerly and lavishly given to governments which profess their anti-Communism even though their peoples with valid reason might have been disenchanted with those governments. At the same time it shows aid, reluctantly given, if at all, to governments which refuse to parrot anti-Communist lines but which, nevertheless, have deep roots in their own peoples. . . .

Where Are We Going in Asia?

"I do not know, Mr. President, where we are heading under the present leadership of this country which, when it is not weak and desultory, tends to be impetuous and arbitrary. I doubt that the leadership itself knows. . . . For example, what really is our policy in the Middle East? Can we live with Arab unity, or can we not? In this connection, we should determine to our own satisfaction the real relationship between Pan-Arabism and Communism. The assumption made by the Administration that Nasser is merely a tool of the Kremlin should be tested as to its validity. . . .

"Where are we going in the Far East? That great area is temporarily quiescent but by no means peaceful. What is our policy? We cannot forever ignore 600 million people on the mainland of China, but what are we doing to make it possible to deal with them on the best terms possible? If anybody in the Administration is giving serious, imaginative, uninhibited thought on a full-time basis to these and many other similar questions which I could cite, I have so far been unable to discover it."

The Sharpest Criticism Yet of Our Military Aid Program As It Boomeranged in Iraq

"We have on a grandiose scale provided peoples of the underdeveloped nations with the weapons of destructive warfare, and have been miserly in providing them weapons to wage war on their own poverty, economic ills and internal weaknesses. Military aid has been on the most lavish scale. Look at what has now happened in Iraq. The Iraqi army, which was the recipient of our arms, has thrown out the government which we regarded as the most friendly and the most reliable of the Arab States. . . .

"How many similar plots are being hatched in other

armies which we are aiding? There are billions of dollars worth of arms and military supplies loose in the world as a result of this aid. Before this equipment rusts, before these supplies are exhausted, I am afraid that we are in for many other unpleasant shocks. . . . Now is this sudden unexpected use of military aid in Iraq the first time that has happened. How much of the equipment furnished to the Nationalist government of China was subsequently used by the Communists to kill Americans in Korea?"

—Fulbright (D. Ark.), U. S. Senate, Aug. 6.

The Key to U.S. Policy at the UN General Assembly on the Mid-East

The key to Anglo-American policy in the Middle East as it will slowly come unwrapped at the special session of the UN General Assembly may be found I believe in that extraordinary tactless and obtuse remark by Robert Murphy that we can live with Arab nationalism and even Nasserism if they are "properly managed and contained." This posture of superiority and assumption of a right to control the Arab countries will stir the derision and suspicion of their ruling elites and intellectuals who do not relish being placed in a kind of American nursery "until they grow up." But this is what our policy makers envisage: an Anglo-American "protectorate" with dollars for development as the reward of good behavior.

The United Nations is designed to be a partial instrument of this policy, a cover for what the Arabs will see as a new variant of imperialism, as the League of Nations was with its mandatory system. UN police forces would take over from the British in Jordan and might also be used in the Persian Gulf oil sheikhdoms. The trouble with this policy is that it runs counter to realities. Jordan is a wholly artificial creation, the most artificial of all the Arab States carved out of the Turkish empire; neither British nor UN troops can save it, nor the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms either from the natural Arab tide toward unity and independence.

This decision "to live with" Arab nationalism (but on Western terms) is also based on a belief that we can thereby avoid the necessity of negotiating with the Soviet Union and thus recognizing that it has natural interests in the Middle East, too. Mr. Dulles is determined never to negotiate with the Russians about anything if he can avoid it, and prefers dealing with Nasser as the lesser evil. The trouble is that in the absence of some agreement between the great Powers, Arab nationalism will play one side against the other. The Middle East cannot be treated by Washington as if it were only a more distant Latin America. It is only by negotiating a new pattern among the great Powers and with the small, Arab and non-Arab, Israeli and Turkish, that stability can be created. This is not easy but it cannot be avoided by pretending that while Russian interests are ignored, Nasser can be "managed" and the Jordanian Humpty-Dumpty held to-

Steve Nelson Bill Opposed

The New York Times (Aug. 8) and the Washington Post (Aug. 7) deserve praise for editorials against anti Supreme Court legislation still pending in the closing days of Congress, and specifically for opposing the Bridges bill to reverse the Steve Nelson decision and restore 42 State sedition laws to full effect. The New York Times called the Bridges bill (which Javits of New York, oddly enough, is supporting) "unnecessary and in the long run unwise" while the Washington Post said it would make confusion and some injustice inevitable.

gether with Scotch tape borrowed from Mr. Hammarskjold.

The Arthur Miller Victory

The U. S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia hates to swallow the bitter pill of the Watkins decision and looked around for some other way to reverse the Arthur Miller contempt conviction without recognizing the Supreme Court ruling and yet without risking a reversal from above. The whole bench of nine judges sat on the Miller appeal (lest a 3-man panel turn out to be dominated by its minority liberals, Edgerton and Bazelon) and found a unanimous face-saving ground for reversal in a "technicality." But when this has been said it must also be admitted that the "technicality" was not without substance.

When Mr. Miller was asked to name others at a Marxist writers' meeting, he asked Chairman Walter "to postpone this question until the testimony is completed" and Walter replied, "Of course, you can do that. . . ." The Committee never returned to the question and never warned the witness he might be held in contempt for refusing to answer. Those of us who were present at the Miller hearing thought (from Walter's friendly words to him as it closed) that the Committee was accepting the playwright's unwillingness as a matter of conscience to name anyone else. Indeed I myself suspect that Walter was ready to do so but was overruled or persuaded later inside the Committee to cite Mr. Miller for contempt. The reversal, however limited in fact, is psychologically another blow at the Committee.

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